

Features

Stevens travels to China, immerses in culture

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Contributing Writer

Michelle Stevens, junior, had the opportunity to experience something many of us probably will never have the chance to do. She lived in Shekou, Shenzhen, China for seven months last school year. She attended WLHS as a freshman and at the beginning of her sophomore year, but moved to China due to her dad's business. During her stay, she lived in a hotel apartment with her parents and three of her sisters.

Stevens witnessed a different way of life in China, which she found to be almost the complete opposite of what she had grown used to in sheltered West Linn.

"It was really eye opening (to see) how people live in China, with their different culture and customs," Stevens said.

Stevens volunteered at an orphanage and experienced first-hand the lives of young orphans in China. They live in extremely small spaces with very limited resources, something that Stevens wasn't used to.

"It was also strange for me because people would stop and stare at me because I have blonde hair and blue eyes, something that isn't seen very often in China."

Stevens attended Shekou International School during her stay where she took a variety of classes that she wouldn't normally have been able to take in the United States, such as Chinese Language and Asian History. She really enjoyed learning the Chinese language, even though it was incredibly difficult, and hopes to pursue similar classes in America.

During her stay in China she acted as a tourist as well as a citizen. She visited popular tourist sites such as The Great Wall of China, Gobe Dessert and the Buddhist and 'Spiky' Mountains. But her favorite place to visit was Hong Kong because of the

shopping and excitement of the city.

She ate a variety of food that she mostly liked, however some she found less appetizing. She tried foods such as camel, chicken intestine and cow's tongue.

"The food wouldn't have

tasted bad if I wasn't told what I was eating," Stevens said. "Most of the food tasted chewy and had different texture."

This year Stevens is back for her junior year, and she has really enjoyed her experience so far.

"It's really nice because the schools are so much bigger here, but it's also kind of overwhelming because I don't feel like I can get to know people as well," she said.

Stevens made many new friends in China and continues to keep in contact with them. She is grateful that she was given the opportunity to be immersed in such a unique and fascinating culture.

"I really enjoyed my experience in China and hope to visit (again) in the future," Stevens said.



Michelle Stevens, junior, and her mom, Tina, raft in Guilin, China. The family lived there for seven months during the previous school year and traveled extensively, sightseeing throughout the country.

Photo submitted by Michelle Stevens

Snapp donates kidney to save brother's life; both in good health

JOSEPH MILLER & LEXI WELP

Staff Reporters

Toni Snapp, Education Resource Center Department Chair, knew her brother, Kevin Tarkalson, needed help and he needed it fast when his kidneys began to fail at an alarming rate. In a short period of time, his kidneys were functioning at only 19%. Snapp, a perfect match, underwent surgery in June to donate her kidney to her brother.

The transplant went successfully, and Snapp and Tarkalson came out in good condition. Snapp spent four days in the hospital and is in good health. Tarkalson also is in good health and returned back to work in mid-September after a long recovery. His kidney started working right after it was put in—this usually doesn't happen until a couple days later.

Before the transplant, Tarkalson had to stop working because his condition affected his eye sight, and he became unable to drive. He was also put on dialysis, which took three to four hours a day. Even then, he focused on being healthy, making it hard for him to keep a regular schedule.

"Automatically I stepped up to be a donor. It's a small sacrifice for saving my brother," Snapp said before the operation. Snapp had to start preparing immediately. She was required to detox her body and exercise before the surgery. Snapp began six months before the big day.

According to Snapp, she

was not going to do anything to jeopardize her and her brother's health. Snapp also had to go through many tests to make sure her's and Tarkalson's kidneys were still a perfect match.

The day before the operation on June 11, Snapp went through preparation for the transplant. She first gave 10 to 15 vials of blood to make sure that Tarkalson's blood wouldn't react to Snapp's. She also underwent other testing before her surgery.

"I couldn't go there, I just had to stay positive," Snapp said about her thinking on possible outcomes of the surgery. During the surgery,

Snapp's left kidney connected to Tarkalson's major arteries. Snapp also took transplant and dialysis classes to be prepared for the operation.

The issues related to Tarkalson's condition will eventually improve and his life expectancy will increase by 18 to 30 years due to the transplant. Snapp will be perfectly fine with one kidney.

Tarkalson's ability to surpass this struggle has earned him a great amount of respect from his sister.

"My admiration for him was always high, but going through this process has made him my hero," Snapp said.

"She gave the ultimate



Toni Snapp, Education Resource Center Department Chair, donated one of her kidneys to save her brother's life. She and her brother have recovered and are in good health.

Photo by Malia Chong

gift to her brother," Tana Dearborn, science department chair, said. Staff members donated money and she was eventually presented with cards and cash so she could do something nice with her family.

Snapp hopes to use this experience to educate her students. She wants to spread the knowledge so that more people can become educated on the topic.

"People with diabetes need to see their doctor yearly, they need to keep a healthy diet, and need to stay healthy," Snapp said. "Unexpected events happen, and we all need to be prepared."

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